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Taizé
EUROPEAN
MEETING OF
YOUNG ADULTS
Stuttgart
28th december
- 1st January '96/97

ON THE WAY TO STUTTGART AND THE EUROPEAN MEETING

Setting out like pilgrims

Preparations for the European Meeting in Stuttgart are now entering their final stages. From one end of Europe to the other, young people are getting ready to leave, busy with final practical details but above all eager to set out like pilgrims.

Those who will be going. Having the chance to know young Germans at the meetings in Taizé this past summer left a deep mark on many of the Polish youth. One of them explained, "One day we had a meeting to consider a question relating to note 2 in the letter 'Choose to love': Wherever it is we may be living, how to be servants of trust rather than masters of fear? Two young Germans who had been to the meeting in Wrocław were there at the workshop and told us about their experience with the Polish families that had received them. The way of life of people in Poland is now undergoing profound change, but with the perspective these two young people had gotten through the meeting in Wrocław, they helped us realize that within even the simplest aspects of our life there exist hidden treasures, something we need to rediscover. Their testimony sparked a very interesting exchange and it was a good way to invite us to Stuttgart."

An Orthodox priest from Bulgaria explains how young people in his country are preparing for the meeting:

"At first glance, going to Taizé or going to one of the European Meetings might seem like just another voyage. However, the preparations beforehand, the journey, the meeting itself and then the

gathering we shall have afterwards in a small monastery are all ways of developing an inner life. Something happens in the participants of these meetings which does not happen elsewhere. The Lord Jesus enters our life not only through his Gospel and the Liturgy, but also through the practical sides of the meetings where we can get to know one another and converse.

On the Sunday after our return from Taizé this past summer, we met together in a little monastery just outside Sofia. The following Sunday, the young people came again but this time together with their parents. Their smiles and their joy brought new life to the monastery. Now new faces are appearing, other young people who are beginning to come and they too are getting ready to go to Stuttgart. After the Holy Liturgy every Sunday, I am always very busy meeting with them, and they too meet and get acquainted. Their parents have begun to show confidence in the initiative and are offering their help."

In Stuttgart, there are already some 500 parishes which have decided to welcome young people during the European Meeting. One of the highpoints of preparations has been the level of commitment shown by local organizers. Priests and pastors remain close alongside the preparation teams and give them their support. Many lay leaders are giving much of their time to insure that all will go well. At one meeting in his own

church, the Lutheran Dean of Stuttgart proposed that a group of volunteers make house-to-house visits in the neighborhood. "Since the European Meeting is such a special event," he said, "we must find special ways to prepare it."



Many foreign communities are present in the city and, by working hand in hand with their neighboring German parishes, they offer a foretaste of the mingling of cultures so much a part of the European Meeting.

Those who left Taizé to help prepare during the months before – whether it be the Brothers of Taizé, the Sisters of Saint Andrew or else the young volunteers from various countries – have found parishes and numerous groups that wish to meet the particular needs of each and every participant. They have discovered too the many activities churches take up in the social domain, the numerous initiatives undertaken on behalf of those in great material difficulty, in particular young people and refugees.

One of the young people who was part of the first group to leave for Stuttgart wrote, "What struck me in autumn first

of all was to see how many parishes invited people to parish festivals. It's wonderful to see this concern to bring people together in ways other than regular meetings and celebrations, to see that they wish simply to spend time together and help others become acquainted. Often a simply prepared meal is served. Various groups come forward and present an informal program. Such festivals enable people, for example, to raise money to support projects in other countries. One parish chose to help finance a social project for young people in their own neighborhood and thus show its concern for people nearby.

It is not unusual to find parishes where a great effort is being made to renew prayer life, particularly in the Sunday worship but also through evening prayer gatherings. The preparations are often a chance for neighboring parishes to work together, even when they are of different denominations. Such collaboration is not

entirely new, but the challenge of welcoming such a large number of young people in families obliges people to approach also those who do not go to church. Such a step means a great deal to many people. Ideas abound when it comes to finding ways to notify local residents. Some groups have put up a stand in the local marketplace, while others go out to visit families and schools..."

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FOUR YEARS AFTER THE VIENNA MEETING

Joy in welcoming others

With the Stuttgart meeting only

weeks away, a young person from Vienna writes to say how much his parish changed through the experience of the 1992 European Meeting in his own city.

The importance of having local parishes themselves shoulder the European Meeting is not always immediately obvious. Ultimately, it is not to be found in the logistical structure parishes can offer, but in the results one sees afterwards: it is only after the meeting is over that one understands the joy there is in welcoming others!

It is true that it was extremely cold in Vienna the year we held the meeting. But at that point one is even more sympathetic to others and opens even more readily his or her door. Since many families lived the same experience of welcoming guests, a shared understanding grew among us in the parish. This hasn't diminished and we see it when people find themselves still sharing news about a young person from Poland or from Spain we received and who has just sent us a letter.

We had a hard time beforehand thinking of everything we would need for the welcome. But in the end, it was okay that way, because our minds and hearts were not filled only by practical details but were open to understand the meaning the meeting could have for us.

The perseverance and fidelity that informing people and asking them to offer hospitality entailed helped change the way we look at our parish. For us and for many others it has become a place of solidarity and openness. A prayer gathering which started at the time of the European Meeting continues monthly. Some of the young people have organized a parish magazine, others have taken responsibility for preparing the Sunday eucharistic celebration, while others still have formed a singing group to breathe new life into our prayer. Another group meets regularly for bible study and prayer. And in our area, we have managed to maintain a monthly prayer that shifts each time from one parish to another.

We have also noticed how much more attention our older parishioners show now to suggestions coming from the young people and how seriously they take them. One such suggestion was to hold a prayer each New Year's Eve like the one we had during the European Meeting, a proposal which was received more than readily.

We have also started having a shared

lunch on Sundays. After the Eucharist young people come together in a parish hall for coffee, then go to visit a family for a little meal and speak together about a Gospel passage with the question: how to put the Gospel into practice in daily life.

I find it so important that we not simply wait for others to take initiatives and do something so that the Church grow and become closer to people. We have to start something ourselves and be ready to take the first steps towards others in need. A few months ago, we took in a woman and her nephew who had nowhere to stay. We arranged the hall for them where the young people normally meet, all the while keeping our eyes open for another more proper place. It being Christmas time, we prepared a celebration for them. People of the parish wanted to know how to help, and once an apartment for them was found, they came with various items to furnish it. This sense of welcoming others shows itself again and again, for example most recently with some of the young people who have started helping elderly members of the parish come to church and return home on Sundays...

P R A Y E R

For the preparation of the European Meeting in Stuttgart:

Meditative songs

Verses from Psalm 24(25)

with "alleluia" sung between each verse

- To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul, I trust in you, let me not be disappointed.
- Lord, make me know your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.
- In you I hope all the day long because of your goodness, O Lord.
- Remember your mercy, Lord, and the love you have shown from of old.
- The Lord is good and upright, showing the path to those who stray.
- God's ways are steadfastness and truth for those faithful to the covenant decrees.

Reading

When the time had come for Jesus to go to his Father, Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared a place for you, I shall return to take you with me, so that where I am you may be too. You know the way to

the place where I am going." Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him." *John 14: 1-7*

Meditative song

Silence

Intercessions

with "Kyrie eleison" or "Gospodi pomiluj" sung between each intercession.

- God our Father, you want us to renew our lives in Christ.
- Lord, you have promised us a new heaven and a new earth.
- You have set us free from all that fetters us by giving us your only Son, you open for us new paths towards freedom.
- Help us to listen and to receive your word with a heart filled with love.
- Once we were not alive but you gave us a new life through the Spirit, you have given us a pure heart.

or Prayer of adoration, with "Adoramus te Domine" sung between each prayer:

- Jesus, Son of the living God, splendour of the Father, eternal light,
- Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, wonderful counselor,
- Jesus, God of peace, friend of all, wellspring of life,
- Jesus, brother of the poor, light of every witness of the truth,
- Jesus, good shepherd, our way and our life,
- Jesus, joy of the angels, crown of all the saints,
- Jesus, our bread of life, lamb of God we adore you.

Our Father

Prayer

Living God, you bury our past in the heart of Christ and you will take care of our future.

or

Spirit of the Risen Christ, Holy Spirit, you flood us with endless kindness. Through it, you make bloom within us a life of humble trust and our hearts grow lighter.

Meditative songs



The words Jesus says at the Last Supper when he offers his disciples the bread and cup confirm a positive understanding of his death. They do so through a rich array of scriptural references, too dense to explicate fully or to identify positively as either Jesus' own words or those arising from contemplation of his gesture under inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

words and farewell before death had in the ancient world (see Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33) and, for that matter, in our own modern world until not long ago, and when we remember that Saint Luke's intention is to write a history in the manner of contemporary Greek writers, we can gather that he has included there a number of Jesus' sayings which he deems worthy of special emphasis. At the same time, we

should understand that this is part of the very essence of final meal, a most opportune moment for conveying to others the very heart of one's life and teaching.

The words spoken at the end of the meal point ahead to the period which will follow Christ's departure and the way of life required of a disciple. The time to come will be one of "trial" (see Luke 22:28), where the faith of the dis-

The Testament of Jesus

part two

Indeed, in every human life there exist privileged moments when a whole life finds itself summed up in the event of an instant; past events re-emerge in a new unity which later events will elucidate and see unfold.

It is the history of God's people that furnishes the images necessary to understand more deeply what Jesus does in symbol at the Last Supper and in reality on the cross. He is the paschal lamb whose given life saves the people from destruction and leads them into a new communion with God (Exodus 12). He is the sacrifice of the (new) covenant (Ex 24, Jeremiah 31) who seals an unbreakable relationship between God and humans, an inner relationship rooted in the heart. He is the servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53) who, through apparent failure, takes upon himself the faults of the multitude and turns them into healing. The simple gesture of sharing a meal thus becomes a way of expressing God's plan in all its depth.

If, however, such a gesture should be so dense in meaning, there must also be words to accompany and interpret it. In Luke's Gospel, the meal itself is followed by a short talk by Jesus. Some of these same words can be found also in Matthew and Mark, however in different contexts. When we realize the solemn importance a person's last

principles in God and in Jesus will be shaken and "sifted like wheat" (Lk 22:31). It will be a new stage in which, unlike the past, they will have to equip themselves with everything necessary in order to resist (Lk 22:35-38). At the same time, they must not be fearful: the prayer of Jesus will allow them to come through unharmed (Lk 22:32) so as to take part in the messianic banquet and reign with him (Lk 22:29-30). It is up to them to hold firm (see Lk 22:28), to trust not in their own strength (Lk 22:33-34) but in God (Lk 22:40) and in Christ. Are not the provisions they must procure nothing other than "God's armour" (see Ephesians 6:13-18)?

In order to live in this new period, the disciples must above all learn a new way of living together. In a way distinct from the manner of human interaction typical of the world around them, they are invited to seek another kind of greatness. Just as Jesus himself had done, the first members of the community are to take the last place and serve others (Lk 22:24-27).

This is especially true of Peter who is called to "strengthen his brothers" (Lk 22:32). The final words of Jesus at the Last Supper in Saint Luke's Gospel foreshadow a time of crisis leading to salvation and a community of disciples that will exist over time, a community called to live as a family through mutual service.

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MEDITATING ON THE WORD JANUARY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOURS

JOHN 3: 1-17

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

1 Wed Peter said: God sent his word, and announced the good news of peace through Jesus Christ; he is the Lord of all.

Ac 10:34-43

2 Thu The Lord says to his people: You are my servant, I have chosen you and will not cast you off. Fear not, for I am with you.

Is 41:8-10

3 Fri Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

Jn 21:15-17

4 Sat We do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Rm 8:26-27

5 SUN Paul writes: The mystery of Christ is that all peoples now share the same inheritance, being members of one body, and having received the same promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel.

Ep 3:2-6

6 Mon EPIPHANY
When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

Mt 2:1-12

7 Tue The Lord says: My servant does not cry out or raise his voice. Faithfully he will present what is just; he will not falter or be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth.

Is 42:1-4

8 Wed Just as each of us has one body with many parts, and the parts do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, who are many, form one body, and each of us belongs to all the others.

Rm 12:3-8

9 Thu St. Paul writes: Be of the same mind, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus himself.

Ph 2:1-11

10 Fri Christ came to announce the joyful message of peace; peace to those who are far away, peace to those who are near. Through him, in one Spirit, we all have free access to the Father.

Ep 2:14-18

11 Sat The Lord says: You are precious in my eyes, I value you and I love you.

Is 43:1-4a

12 SUN At Jesus' baptism, a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my joy is in you."

Mk 1:6-11

13 Mon You are part of God's household. You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.

Ep 2:19-22

14 Tue Jesus said: Whoever does God's will is a brother, a sister and a mother to me.

Mk 3:31-35

15 Wed The Lord says: Look, I am doing something new, even now it is emerging, do you not see it? Yes, I am making a way in the desert and my people will sing my praises.

Is 43:18-21

16 Thu All of us, with our unveiled faces reflecting God's glory like mirrors, are being transformed into the image that we reflect.

2 Co 3:16-18

17 Fri Our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, became poor for your sake, so that through his poverty you might become rich.

2 Co 8:7-15

18 Sat Let no unwholesome talk come from your mouths, but rather good words that serve to encourage others and do good to those who listen to them.

Ep 4:29-32

19 SUN Jesus asked his first disciples, "What do you want?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."

Jn 1:35-42

20 Mon You were called to be free. Do not use your freedom for self-indulgence but to serve one another in love.

Ga 5:13-14

21 Tue Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, my faithful love for you will not be shaken, says the Lord.

Is 54:10

22 Wed In each person the Holy Spirit manifests its action for the good of all.

1 Co 12:4-11

23 Thu Paul writes: The Spirit seeks life and peace.

Rm 8:5-11

24 Fri Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near.

Ph 4:4-7

25 Sat The Lord says to his people: I have carried you since you were conceived. Until your old age I shall be the same, I shall sustain and save you.

Is 46:3-5,9

26 SUN Jesus said to his first disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

Mk 1:16-20

27 Mon Paul writes: Through our faith in Christ Jesus, we can approach God with complete confidence.

Ep 3:7-12

28 Tue The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim freedom to those in captivity.

Lk 4:14-30

29 Wed Isaiah said: I thought my toil had been futile, that I had worn myself out for nothing. Yet all the while my cause was with the Lord and my reward with my God.

Is 49:1-6

30 Thu Paul writes: Judge nothing prematurely, but wait until the Lord comes.

1 Co 4:1-5

31 Fri Jesus said: Happy are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled. Happy are the merciful, for mercy will be shown to them.

Mt 5:1-12

Birth is the moment in which one's life appears as both gift and call. I can be brought into the world only by the act of another person, by someone who is expecting me.

"Being born of the flesh" is to be separated from one's mother's body and to become autonomous; it is to take on a face of one's own and to become able to meet others, face to face. Yet human life is not this alone. A person only becomes fully alive when he or she discovers, beyond themselves, a "why" or a "whom" to live for. If there is nothing to live for or if one is alone, a person will find neither the energy or motivation needed to set out into life, filled as it is with suffering.

"Being born from above" is to discover that one's deepest identity is to be found ahead of us, in the process of becoming, where choices and responsibility come into play. Recognizing clearly the "why" of our existence and anchoring it within God, gives our desire a direction over the course of a whole lifetime.

"Being born of water" is a reference to a reality already evoked at Jesus' own baptism (Mt 3:16-17). Coming up out of the dark waters, together with Christ, is to be liberated from the power of evil, fear and death in order to take part here and now in his resurrection.

To be born into this world by the Spirit who "makes us cry out, Abba, Father," means leaving self-pre-occupation behind and opening ourselves to God's hope for us, entering thereby into a life of communion. This means to hear, in silence and peace, the call of Christ who tells us of God's plan and draws us out of self-isolation.

- Which persons have "born me into the world" through their trust in God?

- How does the Father's gaze upon me help me to awaken others to the life of the Spirit?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

FEBRUARY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 10:21-22

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps form a time of prayer.

1 Sat Thus says the Lord: Does a woman forget her child at the breast, or fail to cherish her offspring? Even if she forgets, I will never forget you.

Is 49:13-15

2 SUN PRESENTATION OF THE LORD When Simeon saw the child Jesus, he praised God and said: Now, Lord, you can let your servant depart in peace as you promised. For my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared for all people to see.

Lk 2:22-38

3 Mon Jesus noticed a tax collector called Matthew sitting at the tax office and he said to him, "Follow me." And, leaving everything, Matthew got up and followed him.

Lk 5:27-32

4 Tue Looking at his disciples, Jesus said: Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

Lk 6:20-23

5 Wed The servant of God says: The Lord is coming to my help. Who then can condemn me?

Is 50:7-9

6 Thu In God we live and move and have our being.

Ac 17:22-28

7 Fri Jesus said to his disciples: Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.

Lk 12:22-32

8 Sat You have become light in the Lord. Live as children of the light.

Ep 5:8-14

9 SUN Very early, long before dawn, Jesus got up and went to a deserted place and there he prayed. When the disciples found him, he said to them, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also."

Mk 1:29-39

10 Mon We do not proclaim ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord. We are your servants for Jesus' sake.

2 Co 4:5-7

11 Tue The Lord says: I have put water in the desert for my people to drink. The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises.

Is 43:18-21

12 Wed ASH WEDNESDAY Jesus said: When you give, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your generosity is secret. And your Father, who sees all that is done in secret, will reward you.

Mt 6:1-4

13 Thu Pray in the Spirit at all times. Never tire of praying for all God's people.

Ep 6:18-20

14 Fri The Lord says: My home is a high and holy place, but I am with the humble and contrite to revive their spirit.

Is 57:14-15

15 Sat Even if I can understand all mysteries and know all things, even if I have the faith to move mountains, if I am without love I am nothing.

1 Co 13:1-13

16 SUN After being tempted in the desert, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God. "The time has come," he said, "the kingdom of God is at hand. Turn to God and believe in the good news of the Gospel."

Mk 1:12-15

17 Mon Stand firm, let nothing shake you, be full of energy for the work of God, knowing that in the Lord nothing of your labour is wasted.

1 Co 15:54-58

18 Tue The Lord says to his people: No longer will violence be heard of in your land. You will call your gates "Praise". The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, your God will be your glory.

Is 60:18-20

19 Wed The days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall send hunger upon the land; not hunger for food or thirst for water, but a hunger to hear the word of God.

Am 8:11

20 Thu God will guide his people in joy, with the mercy and saving justice that come from him.

Ba 5:1-9

21 Fri Paul writes: The whole of creation has been groaning as in childbirth up to the present time. And we too groan inwardly as we wait with eagerness for our bodies to be set free.

Rm 8:18-25

22 Sat As the earth sends up its shoots and a garden lets its seeds sprout, so the Lord will cause justice and praise to spring up.

Is 61:10-11

23 SUN Jesus was transfigured in the presence of his disciples. And a cloud covered them with its shadow, and from the cloud a voice came, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

Mk 9:2-10

24 Mon Jesus said: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Lk 6:27-35

25 Tue Paul writes: I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best.

Ph 1:1-11

26 Wed Blessed be God who consoles us in all our afflictions. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

2 Co 1:3-7

27 Thu The Lord says: See, I am going to create new heavens and a new earth. Be filled with rejoicing for ever, for I am creating my people to be gladness.

Is 65:17-18

28 Fri Jesus said: Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

Mt 5:38-42

He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

Joy is often perceived as the end result of our own efforts, to be found for example in having done something well, or else as a fleeting instant in what is otherwise a continuum of worries. In scripture, however, joy is there at every new beginning: as the angels sing for the newborn Christ-child on that dark evening, with the disciples at Easter before even they have fully comprehended, proclaimed at Pentecost when the consoling Spirit opens the doors and enables the marvels of God to be expressed in every language.

Joy is present too at the start of every encounter. Jesus' own jubilation in the Gospel is an invitation for us to discover it ourselves. Other people are a source of joy not because of the satisfaction they can bring me, but because they are loved by God each in a unique manner and are entrusted to me. You are God's joy, and the Lord wishes that you be my joy also. God wishes that the Holy Spirit enlighten the eyes of my heart ready as they so often are to judge others, that my heart be made wider, and that an expectant hope be woken up within me.

I am not responsible for creating my own joy (if so, my whole life would be torn between the search for satisfaction and the threat of disillusionment) but I am responsible for being always in wait for it. I am responsible for confiding to God all the obstacles I come across and for allowing him to change my heart of stone into a heart which loves. Could this be the way which the starets and saints Seraphim of Sarov himself discovered and which led him to greet each one of his visitors with the words, "O, my joy!"

- What helps me to see "my joy" in each person I meet?
- Which "infants" are a source of thankfulness in my life?



Listening to the continents

India

In Assam, solidarity with refugees

"Preparing to foster reconciliation on all levels"... "an attitude of openness to those who need us here and now"... "setting out towards other Christians"... these are some of the aims of many of the people who will be taking part in the Stuttgart Meeting at the end of December. They are aims very similar to those that have been very much to the forefront in recent months in Assam, in North India, following the outbreak of ethnic violence there in May. One of the Taizé brothers who live in nearby Bangladesh wrote at the time, "I arrived in Assam just at the time of the confrontation between the Boros and the Santals. I have never seen so many refugees, and so many burned out houses. It was heart-breaking to meet the people in the camps. They had lost so much and ahead of them their future is so uncertain. Some were trying to find out what had happened to their children, or their brothers and sisters."

Indeed, the worst-ever communal violence in the two districts of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon in West Assam left behind a trail of death and devastation. The ethnic clash between Bodos and Santals resulted in the death of hundreds of people. According to reports, more than 100,000 people have been rendered homeless. They are now sheltering in various relief camps. One of the parish priests there said, "Till a few days ago, our parish was like a family. It is heart-breaking to see the plight of the people whose homes we have visited and whose hospitality we have enjoyed. The Bodos, the Santals and the Adivasis have prayed

and sung and danced together. Things won't be the same any more. The future looks bleak. When will the people be able to return to their villages? Will they ever be able to return?"

Another priest, who earlier this year spent two months in Taizé, writes: "From 20 to 23 July, I took time out to visit the Bodo-Santal riot affected areas, spending several hours in each of the eleven relief camps in Kokrajhar District. I discovered about 200,000 people living in the most appalling conditions. They lack the necessities of life: food, shelter and clothing. How so many have survived in such conditions remains a mystery for me. According to the people in the relief camps, the administration is supplying rice and dal in small quantities regularly, but it is not enough. The pain of hunger is vivid on the faces of the hundreds of children who extend their bowl for food to the priests, brothers, sisters and other volunteers who seem to understand their plight. "For shelter, a few are fortunate enough to have a school building or community hall or some other public building. Others are under plastic shelter and in open fields. A large number of people have made temporary sheds with plastic sheets or leaves. With the torrential rains of the summer, these protections are totally inadequate. 'When it rains it is impossible for us to sleep,' said a young man from Salakati, 'we just sit together under the thin plastic sheet'.

"A number of people are suffering from malaria and dysentery and the government has sent in medical assistance. Personally, I wonder how, under the present conditions, epidemics have so far been avoided. Lying in their shabby sheds, people are sick, yet they are reluctant to go and get the necessary medicine. When they get it, they do not follow the directions of the doctor or the nurse. 'When, in a Santal camps, medicine is distributed by Boros, they do not seek help because they are afraid that they will be poisoned', said some of the volunteers."

On 4 September, all the volunteers and members of the inter-church peace mission gathered at St Aloysius Seminary, Bongaigaon, for a prayer of thanksgiving. One of the Taizé brothers who was in India at the time was present. Archbishop Thomas Menampampil of Guwahati introduced the prayer, saying, "After four months of agony and anxiety, now our prayer will be a prayer of hope and confidence." Bishop Nityananda Bongoary, from the Guarang Mission (Lutheran Evangelical Church) commented the last chapter of Isaiah. A long silence followed and everyone could feel what these four months had meant. They joined together in expressing their hope as they sang, "Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord, keep watch, take heart." At an earlier gather-

ing in May, the Archbishop had said, "The Church throughout the year prays for no other intention as much as for peace. The wounds of hatred and mistrust may take a long time to heal, but our prophetic presence with the witness of the Gospel is important in such a moment of crisis." Urging the Christian communities to be prepared to assist the victims of the conflict in whatever way they can, he explained that the tasks for the communities include education for peace, efforts at reconciliation and reconstruction of family economic and social setups. A meeting of the leaders of the various churches which took place in the Baptist Mission Centre, Guwahati, on 31 May had decided that the leaders would visit the riot-affected areas. Their objective is to express Christian solidarity with the victims and to promote the message of peace and harmony.

Sweden

Welcoming others through simple prayer

"Many young people in Sweden have difficulty," writes Sara from Göteborg, "when it comes to taking part in their local church worship, in celebrations where the spoken word has such overwhelming importance. Staying in Taizé and meeting there many other young Christians from throughout the world has given young Swedes new inspiration and ideas for their local churches. In several churches of our city of Göteborg, we have been meeting regularly for prayer celebrations where time is given for Taizé songs and for silent prayer. The music and the silence speak to people's hearts."

Among those who attend the prayers we see immigrants, refugees from all around the world, young people, as well as people who say they are in the throws of doubt and are seeking God without having yet found him. There are also adults and elderly people who like to come. One day we noticed a very old man - 90 years old and active in the church his whole life long, as we later discovered. When the prayer ended, we went over to him and asked if he hadn't found the celebration a little too different from what he was used to, to which he replied, "Yes, different and better!" He wore a big smile and since then has not missed a single prayer with the Taizé songs.

Though a large number of the participants are foreigners who do not speak good Swedish, this does not keep them from taking part fully in the prayer for everything remains very simple. Recently, a Serbian orthodox woman from Bosnia told me how delighted she was to have

Jesus our peace, your Gospel assures us: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Even if our faith should be very small, little by little a living flame of charity and love is kindled inside us. And the dark nights our hearts experience can become, through you, the dawn of a new life.

prayer by Brother Roger

found music from her own liturgical tradition in the book of Taizé songs.

Since a number of years, there is also a group of people who gather regularly in small groups to support one another in living simply and in solidarity with others. They share a modest meal, pray together and then sit down to speak and share."

Bangladesh

A hope for the future

Osnamu Minura, from Japan, writes:

"Are there many Christians in Bangladesh?" Many people asked me this question before I left Japan for Bangladesh. The encounter with the Mandi people, one of the tribes in Bangladesh, 96% of whom are Christian, was a great surprise to me. Through the meeting from 9 to 13 May, in Buluchora, a beautiful village near the Indian border, my image of Bangladesh as a solely Muslim country was shattered. More than 250 young people from the Mandi, Hajong, Mundd and Oraon tribes gathered to talk about "inner life and human solidarity". As some of them made a presentation about their life, history, religion, and their distress, I began to feel dizzy with the sheer diversity of this country.

One of the highlights of the meeting was the overnight stay in the Hajong villages. More than 200 people, divided into groups, visited ten Hajong villages, all of which were two or three hours walking distance away. There, we heard about the difficulties the people are facing; the

Mandis and Hajongs discovered that they suffered from very similar problems of poverty and injustice. We tried to share our hope for the future. One young Mandi told me that he had never imagined that one day he would sleep in a Hajong house, while a Hajong expressed his wonderment at being able to welcome Mandis in his home, let alone a guest from Japan! I believe that this small adventure of young people has cut a new way forward in human solidarity, a way which could change some of the situations which exist in this country and which could well become a great challenge to the churches and to the people in affluent countries. Here, you can witness Jesus walking through the villages, just as he passed through the Samaritan village in St. John's Gospel."

France

A new form of solidarity

During the summer meetings in Taizé, a young woman teaching at an engineering school in Lille, in the north of France, spoke about her life and work.

"The courses I give to future engineers offer them a chance to pursue a meaning in life and reflect on it. The course subjects are philosophy and ethics. We take time to consider the various professional choices they may be making, as well as the technical decisions that may have consequences directly or indirectly on people's lives.

Soon after I had started teaching, I began to understand that I should give

some thought to the choice I myself had made about where to live; I had decided to live in the countryside for the sake of peace and tranquility. Eventually I began looking for an apartment in a neighborhood where some friends of mine had started living a community life. They had moved there because it was poor, and be close to disadvantaged people. The building where I now live has just recently been renovated, and the people who inhabited it before have been able to stay on. Three-fourths of the sixty-some families living there are without work and over half are immigrants, even if some have settled in France already two or three generations ago.

Residing in the neighborhood has had a definite effect on my classwork. We no longer think only about the theoretical implications of the choices we make, but about how we can pay more attention to others. As for myself, these "others" can be the strangely silent child I meet on the street, or else the neighbor who throws parties night after night. I can sense the deep distress that exists around me, but also I have come to appreciate the wonderful work being done by volunteers and professionals who offer their help. I am discovering a new form of solidarity, the kind that simply happens when people get to know one another. We are making a great effort precisely to help people meet and learn to accept one another."

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